

# A Feather In The Wind

by thisiswhereIkeepmyfics

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Summary: A Riain fic inspired by (and containing) spoilers for the ep on the 23rd April. Mark won't leave Rita alone, can her relationship with Iain survive everything Mark puts them through?

## 1. Chapter 1

I saw the spoilers for the episode on the 23rd and they have inspired this, my first long-ish Riain fic. It's probably going to be a bit darker & more angsty than the things I usually write so I'm going to keep writing the odd fluffy oneshot too.

I'll be super impressed if anyone knows where the title of this fic was taken from!

\* \* \*

><p>"Reet?" Iain frowned when he answered his phone just half an hour after he'd said goodbye to her, "is everything alright?" He was instantly worried, she never called him when she knew he was working, and, as he'd be seeing her again in just over an hour, he knew she'd only ring him if she really had to. "Rita" her lack of response worried him even more.<p>

"He's been here" she finally sobbed into her phone, her breath catching in her throat, it had taken her a moment to find his number, her fingers shaking so much she could barely keep hold of her phone, "first the complaints and now, now he's been in my house Iain, he's, he's been in my bedroom."

"Get out" Iain said sharply, "get out of the house and ring the police. I'm on my way right now" she didn't need to tell him who she was referring to, he knew exactly who she meant. He briefly thought that it might not have been Mark that had done whatever it was that had Rita so afraid but he wasn't going to take that chance

"Iain" he could hear the fear in her voice and it broke his heart.

"It'll be okay" he promised, "go to the shop at the end of your road and ask the police to meet you there. He's probably just trying to scare you but if he is planning anything Rita he won't do it in public."

"Can youâ€¦"

"I'm on my way" he promised before looking over at Jez, "I've got to go, can youâ€¦" he didn't even know what he wanted Jez to do.

"I'll sort it" the younger paramedic nodded, "you go and make sure Rita's alright."

"Cheers mate" Iain jogged out of the ambulance station before speaking to Rita again, "where are you?"

"I'm going to the shopâ€¦ like you said."

"Okay, I'm on my way but I'm going to hang up now so you can ring the police, if I'm not there by the time you've done then call me straight back yeah?"

He heard Rita sniffle slightly, "okay" she whispered.

"Reet" he said softly.

"Yeah?"

"I love you, I love you and we're going to be okay. You're going to be okay" he told her as he raced through the streets, not even bothering to apologise to the people he bumped into. Rita was the only thing on his mind and he needed to be with her as soon as possible.

"I love you too" Rita whispered before ending the call and dialing 999.

"Rita" she fell against him as soon as she saw him, unable to contain the sobs, the tears she'd been holding back since she'd seen her trashed bedroom, a moment longer. He held her tightly, kissing her head and telling her she was safe over and over again until he noticed her breath catching in her throat, "Rita" he said again, tipping her head so he could look her in the eye, it was then when he saw just how terrified she was.

"Iain" she gasped, "I can't, Iâ€¦"

"Take a deep breath" he told her, doing so himself as he lead her out of the shop, "you're scared and upset, you're having a panic attack but you're going to be okay, I'm not going anywhere, you need to try and slow your breathing down Reet, you're going to be okay." He kept his breathing deliberately slow so Rita could try and match it, he'd had panic attacks himself after leaving the army, he didn't need to see the fear on her face to know how scared she was right now. He kept his eyes locked on hers as she looked up at him, his arms around her as he continued to talk softly to her, reminding her she was safe

and telling her that he loved her in between stories of silly things Jez had said or done that he told her as an attempt to distract her from the thoughts racing through her head.

"Is everything okay sir?" Rita was just beginning to calm down when the police arrived.

"Yeah, are you here for Rita Freeman?"

The police officer nodded and Iain pointed to the woman in his arms before gesturing down the road, "she lives at number 63, do you want to meet us there?"

The police officer nodded again, "you can come with us in the car" he suggested but Iain shook his head.

"She's just had a panic attack, I think she needs the fresh air, it's not far."

Iain took the key from Rita when they reached her front door, her hands shaking too much to get it in the lock, "I've only seen my bedroom" Rita said once she'd stepped into the hall with Iain and the two police officers, "I erm, my ex-husband came to the hospital where I work last week, I've been staying with Iain ever since" she gestured to the man who still had his arm around her, "I was just going to pick up a few things and go straight back there butâ€¦" she shrugged.

"Do you know how he got in?" The policeman asked.

Rita shook her head, "the front door was locked, I moved here almost a year after he went to prison, he's never lived here, he's never had a key."

"Right" The policeman scribbled in his notebook, "I'll go upstairs and have a quick look, did you move anything?" Rita shook her head, she hadn't been able to, she'd stood frozen in the doorway, frozen with fear before her brain had started repeating one word over and over '\_Iain\_'. The policeman nodded before turning to his female colleague, "you have a look down here" he said before turning back to Rita and Iain, "and if you just give us a moment to see if there's any other damage and doublecheck there's nobody in the house and then we'll take a statement" he said as he headed up the stairs.

Rita felt sick, what if he was still here? What if he'd seen her come home, watched her call Iain? What if he'd been watching her for a while. "Iain" his name fell from her lips as he legs buckled beneath her, she couldn't do this, not again, she couldn't have him break her again, there was no way she'd be able to put herself back together again.

"You're okay" Iain sat Rita on the stairs before she collapsed into a heap on the floor, "look at me" he said firmly as he crouched in front of her, "look at me. He's not going to hurt you. If I have to stop working and be by your side every minute of every day, if you have to come to every shout with me, he won't hurt you. You might have been on your own before but not this time okay?"

"Youâ€¦"

He took her hands and held them in his, "I'm not going anywhere Reet, you're going to be okay."

"Anything?" The policeman asked the policewoman who came out of the kitchen at the same time he walked down the stairs.

"The back door's been forced open" she nodded, "and this was on the table" she said, holding out a sheet of paper, the corner held in her gloved hand to protect the evidence.

Rita took one look at the note and felt her stomach churn, it was Mark's handwriting, she'd been right, he'd been here, he'd been in her house, and, as she read the few words he'd left her, she knew, she knew it would never be over. She could leave, she could move to the other side of the world but Mark would find her, he'd always come back. Mark wasn't going to let her move on, he didn't want her to be happy and Rita knew from experience, Mark always got what he wanted.

## 2. Chapter 2

I am crazy excited about this fic, it's going to be quite different to what I usually write, and I think it's the first time I've ever planned a fic out before writing it. I usually just wing it as I go along but I know exactly what's going to happen in this one! I hope you all like it as much as I do!

I don't really know much about the policew/law side of things in a case like this other than what I've seen on Happy Valley/Judge Judy etc but I felt like this chapter was needed to set the scene ready for when the good stuff (or not so good stuff as the case may be) starts happening in the next chapter or two.

\* \* \*

><p><em>'You think you're something special don't you? I've seen you with lover boy but you forget, you forget that I know what you're like Rita. You'll mess it up, just like you mess everything else up. And when you do, I'll be waiting for you.'<em>

His words repeated themselves again and again in her head, he'd been watching her with Iain, he'd broken into her house, been in her bedroom, he was waiting for herâ€¦ It was only Iain gently squeezing her hands that brought Rita back to reality and she realised the male police officer had been speaking to her, she caught the end of what he was saying and manage a nod in response, "... and because of that I think it might be wise to take your statement down at the station, we've got a forensic team on the way, if it was Mr Richie we'll be able to match any DNA they find with that already on his police record."

"It was him" Rita whispered, "that, that note is in his handwriting."

The policeman nodded and pulled out a clear, plastic, evidence bag from one of his pockets, holding it open so the policewoman could drop the note into it, "we'll leave it for forensics to collect with any other evidence they find. We'll go down to the station as soon as

they get here."

"Can, can Iain come?"

"Of course" the female police officer said softly before looking at Iain, "we'll want a statement from you too" she told him before turning her attention back to Rita, "is there anywhere else you can stay tonight? If not we can arrange for an officer toâ€|"

"She can stay with me" Iain interrupted, "We'll go to a hotel tonight, then tomorrow we'll go out, get some CCTV cameras and extra locks for the doors and go back to mine."

The police officers both nodded as the male officer spoke, "we'll take your details at the station so we can contact Miss Freeman if we need to."

Once at the police station Rita told the officers about everything, the abuse she'd suffered at his hands during their marriage, how he'd cornered her in his office the previous week, how Iain had warned him off, told him to leave her alone. She told them about the teenager he'd got pregnant, about the complaints made about her by a fictitious patient that she was sure he was responsible for. She told them how scared she was of him, how sick she felt knowing he was around but not knowing exactly where he was but the police could already see that, Rita's tears had barely stopped since she'd left Iain's side and her shaking hands and the quiver in her voice gave away just how much Mark terrified her.

Rita felt relieved that the police were taking things seriously, that they weren't trying to brush it off or get her to 'forget' about it. They told her they'd check out Mark's last known address, speak with his probation officer to get him in for questioning. They'd mentioned harassment charges to go with the breaking and entering charge he'd be facing, and told her that, should she want it, any judge would grant her a restraining order against her ex-husband, something she said she wanted to do even though she knew it would make no difference to Mark, if he wanted her, he wouldn't let something as trivial as a restraining order stop him.

It had taken the police a little over an hour to take Rita's statement, but to Rita each minute seemed to drag on for hours. She wanted Iain, she wanted him to hold her, she wanted to curl into his chest whilst he held her, kissed her and promised her she was safe because she knew she was when she was with him. She knew that as soon as Iain's arms wrapped around her waist that nothing could hurt her, he was her soldier, her knight in shining armour. She needed him to hold her, to catch her before she completely fell apart.

She'd collapsed into him as soon as she'd left the interview room. He too had given a statement to the police, telling them everything Rita had told him about the man, about how he'd told him to leave her alone just a week ago, he'd told them how he feared the man was a danger to the woman he loved.

The police officers gave Rita a few minutes with Iain to calm down before approaching her again, they gave her some leaflets that they'd promised her, information on trained counselors and 'victim support' groups where she could speak to people who'd dealt with similar things in the past and get the support she'd need to carry on with

her life. They also told her what would happen next, what would happen when they found Mark, what charges he'd be facing and how she could go ahead with getting a restraining order.

"The officers at your house will secure the back door the best they can for you" the policeman told her, "but you might need to get someone out to look at it in the morning, and can I suggest, and I know it will be hard, but as soon as you can, you return to your house and try to see if any belongings are missing, if you need a police officer to accompany you for safety then you can give us a call."

Iain nodded, "I'll go with her" Iain told them, "we'll do it in the next couple of days, you'll need some clothes and things" he said softly to Rita.

"No" she whispered, "I don't want anything that he's touched. I, I'll see if anything's missing but I'm not keeping anything, it's all going in the bin."

"Okay Darling, okay" Iain wasn't going to argue with Rita, he completely understood why she wanted to get rid of everything Mark had touched and he wasn't going to try and change her mind.

He held Rita until she'd calmed down before asking the police to call them a taxi and he kept her hand firmly encased in his as the taxi took them back to his house, "I'm going to grab us a few things" he said after asking the taxi driver to wait for a few minutes, "are youâ€|"

He didn't get chance to finish, "I'm coming in with you."

Rita barely left Iain's side as he packed them a bag for the night, she was like his shadow, staying within touching distance as he gathered the things they'd need, "have I missed anything?" He asked once he'd finished packing, Rita hadn't slept at her own house since Mark had returned the week before so Iain was able to pack her her own things, even though he knew she'd only want to sleep in a tshirt of his.

Rita shook her head, "no, I don't think so."

Iain smiled and held his hand out, allowing Rita to link her fingers with his, "come on then, let's go."

They sat in silence during the taxi ride to the hotel, Rita lost in thoughts about Mark, a constant stream of 'what ifs' bouncing around her head. She knew this was Mark's plan, one of his games, that it was the thoughts of what he could do to Rita that scared her the most, she knew what he was capable of, she didn't need anyone to spell it out for her.

She was only broken from her thoughts by Iain kissing her temple once he'd paid the taxi driver, "come on" he said softly, "let's get in and get you settled yeah?" Once again her hand found Iain's as they walked inside the hotel and he checked them in, "I'd like a room for tonight" he told the receptionist.

"Of course, would you like a double or a twin."

"A double please" he didn't need to ask Rita, he wasn't sure if either of them would get a wink of sleep but he was certain that, asleep or awake, Rita would spend the night curled right into his side.

"And can I take your names please?"

"It's Mr & Mrs Deanman" he answered without hesitating, he'd decided in the taxi to use a fake name, it was obvious that Mark had been watching Rita, if he gave a fake name he wouldn't find out they were staying in the hotel if he, or anyone else asked for him or Rita at reception.

"Thank you" she typed the details into the computer, and, after Iain had paid in cash to hide the fact the name on his cards didn't match the name he'd given, they were given a key, and directions to a room on the third floor of the hotel.

"Oh Iain" Rita whispered, tears filling her eyes almost as soon as the door to their room clicked shut.

"Come here" he reached behind her and clicked the lock shut before wrapping his arms around her as she began to sob as the day's events suddenly hit her.

Iain wanted to cry too, Rita was his world, he'd never admit it to anyone but her, but all he wanted to do was keep her safe, she brought out the 'caveman' in him. He was the man, she was the woman, it was his duty to protect her, to provide her with whatever she needed. He'd fight for her, kill for her if he had to and here she was, sobbing in his arms and there was absolutely nothing he could do to fix her.

"I'm scared" she whispered.

"I know" Iain said softly, "but I meant what I said earlier, "as long as I've got a breath in me, I'll be there for you, I'm not going to let him lay a finger on you Love."

"But what about when you're not there? When we have to go back to work andâ€¦"

"Don't worry about it" he said calmly as he felt her begin to panic, "I'll speak to Connie and Charlie myself if I have to, we'll explain what's happened, I know you're scared but everyone in that department loves you Rita, they're your friends. If they know what's happening they'll keep an eye out. If all the staff, and security all know to keep an eye out then he's going to struggle to get anywhere near you. You'll be okay Rita, I'll make sure of that." He kissed her head before softly asking, "shall we get changed and get into bed?"

Rita nodded, "I erm, I don't know how well I'll sleep."

"That's okay, we can curl up and watch some tv, I'm not going anywhere Rita, I mean that."

He stepped away from her only briefly to check the door was locked and to move the chair from the small desk in the room, placing it in front of the door so that they'd be alerted should anyone try to get into their room.

Once he'd done that he helped Rita change out of her clothes and pull on a t-shirt of his own over her underwear before he got into the bed. He sat back against the headboard and she settled herself between his thighs, her back against his chest, his arms around her waist, completely engulfed by her thoughts.

It took a while but eventually exhaustion took over and Iain felt Rita began to relax against him as she slipped into a restless sleep. It was only then that Iain let his own tears fall, he loved Rita, she was so much more to him than a fling or a friend with benefits and it was killing him to know he couldn't take away the one thing that was hurting her. He kissed her forehead, she was so beautiful but so broken, she was falling apart in front of him and he only hoped that she'd let him stay close enough so that he could help her pick up the pieces and build herself up again.

### 3. Chapter 3

Okay, I think this might be the last 'setting the scene' chapter before the good stuff starts in the next! I hope you like it! :D

\* \* \*

><p>Iain spent a restless night holding Rita, she'd slept through the night but her slumber was frequently interrupted by nightmares, images of Mark, flashbacks to her marriage but she didn't wake. Iain's sleep was so light that even the tiniest movement from Rita woke him. He'd spent most of his night kissing her head, running his fingers through her hair and whispering quietly in her ear, reassuring her that he loved her and that she was safe.<p>

She finally woke a little after 8am but Iain was already awake, holding her closely as she relaxed against his chest, "morning" she mumbled.

"Morning Beautiful" Iain smiled softly, kissing her hair once again before asking, "how did you sleep?"

"I kept dreaming he was here" she whispered.

"Oh Rita" Iain said softly before admitting, "you were a bit restless."

"I'm sorry" Rita mumbled, "you should have woken me, told me to move so you could sleep."

"What, and let you battle with him on your own? It doesn't matter if he's in your head or in your house Reet, I'm not going to let him hurt you okay."

Rita tipped her head back so Iain could kiss her lips, "I love you."

He smiled, "I love you too, now, why don't we have a shower and get off? I want to go to homebase or Wickes or somewhere so I can have a look at alarms and CCTV for the house."

"You don't have to do that."



"No" he agreed, "I don't, but I want to, if you're staying with me then I want you to feel safe in the house and whether that takes CCTV cameras, alarms or just a few more locks and bolts on the door then I'll do it Rita, I'm not him and I hope to God I never make you feel like he does."

"You don't" she whispered.

"Good" he kissed her again, "are you coming for a shower with me?" Rita nodded and Iain smiled, "you go and turn the shower on to warm up, I'll grab the washbag and be two minutes" Rita hesitated, "two minutes I promise, I'll be right behind you."

They spent half an hour in the shower, they washed quickly but Iain's hands found their way to Rita's waist and she'd collapsed against his chest, physically and emotionally exhausted by the past 24 hours, the nightmares and flashbacks leaving her tireder than a double shift in the ED.

Iain had simply held her close as she sobbed against him, he'd rubbed her back, ran his fingers through her damp hair and occasionally kissing her wet skin as he murmured assurances that she was safe, constantly reminding her that he loved her and he wasn't going to leave her.

He wiped her tears away with his thumb once she'd calmed down a little and tilted her chin upwards so he could kiss her lips, "alright?"

"I'm sorry" Rita whispered.

Iain turned off the shower and reached for a towel, wrapping the soft fabric around Rita's tiny body as he told her, "you've got nothing at all to apologise for Love, nothing at all."

They dried and dressed before making their way down to reception, hand in hand, where Iain checked them out and asked the receptionist to call them a taxi. It was a short drive back to Iain's home and, after paying the taxi driver, he dumped the bag at the bottom of the stairs and picked up his car keys, "do you want to get something to eat while we're out?" Iain asked as he got into the car, suddenly remembering neither of them had eaten in almost 24 hours.

"I'm not hungry" Rita said quietly, unable to look Iain in the eye once she was in the car.

He reached for her hand, squeezing it softly and stopping her from playing with a loose thread on her t shirt, "you need to eat Rita."

"Can we, can we just get what we need and come back?" Her eyes still didn't meet his.

Iain nodded and gave Rita's hand a final squeeze before starting the engine, "sure."

"You really don't have to do this" Rita reminded Iain as they walked through the shop together, his arm around her waist as she curled tightly into his side.

"I want you to feel safe Rita, if this helps then it'll be worth every penny."

She said nothing, just watching as he picked up new, 'extra strength' door locks and security chains, dropping them into the basket he held before they walked over to an aisle labeled simply, 'home security.'

"Iain" Rita frowned as he picked up an alarm system from a shelf, "that's...no, look at the price, it's, it'sâ€¦"

"Rita" he put the box down and gently turned to face him, "Mark is a monster. There is every chance he might just have wanted to scare you by doing what he did and that we'll never see or hear from him again but I think I'd rather be safe, and a few hundred quid lighter, than sorry yeah. I want to know that, at least when you're at home you're going to be safe. And, if nothing happens, if he never comes back, then I'll let you say I told you so as much as you like."

Rita simply nodded, she didn't know how to respond, part of her was insisting it was too much, that he shouldn't have to spend so much just because of her, because of the mess she'd brought into his life, but the other half of her was touched that Iain would go to such extremes to make sure she was safe.

Iain filled the basket quickly, picking up an alarm system, sensors to alert them if any of the downstairs windows or doors were opened, keyrings to control the alarm system and even a panic button, just in case he ever had to leave Rita alone in the house. He added a set of CCTV cameras with lights and a large hard drive to the basket before slipping his hand in Rita's and walking over to the till.

"That'll be Â£784.92 please" the cashier told him once she'd scanned everything through and Rita's face fell.

"Let me pay?" She said, beginning to rummage through her bag for her purse.

"No" Iain said simply, pulling his wallet from his pocket and handing over his credit card before Rita had chance to protest.

"Iain"

"Rita" he kissed her temple. "I'd pay that a million times over if it meant you were safe yeah so stop worrying about it and help me carry them out to the car" he winked cheekily at her as he put his wallet back in his pocket.

He spent the afternoon fitting and testing the alarms and cameras before going to his neighbours to ask them to call the police if they ever heard the alarm going off, he hoped that Mark was gone, that he'd given Rita a fright and he'd never be seen again but he wasn't going to take any chances.

"Why don't we head over to yours, go through things like the police asked? Get it over and done with?" He asked later that afternoon after he'd convinced Rita to eat a slice of toast despite her still insisting that she wasn't hungry.

Rita nodded, "I suppose so."

"We don't have to."

"No, no" Rita stood from the sofa, "it needs doing and you're right, it's probably best to get it done sooner rather than later."

Just like Rita, Iain froze when he saw her bedroom, she'd been right when she'd told the police the room had been trashed. Every drawer had been pulled from the unit, clothes strewn everywhere, the covers and mattress had been pulled from her bed and her wardrobe had been emptied. Her TV laid on the floor, smashed from where it had been pushed from on top of her dressing table and both the curtain rail and blind had been pulled from the wall.

"Iain" Rita whispered, "I, I can'tâ€|"

"Are you sure you don't want to keep anything?"

Rita shook her head, "no, no, Iâ€| nothing."

"Okay, let's bag everything up and then get out of here."

They worked in silence for a while, Rita working on one side of the room, Iain the other, Rita hardly looking at the things she picked from the floor before tossing them into the bag she held, she felt sick just thinking about Mark being in here, about him looking through her things, touching the things she'd worked so hard to replace the first time round. She had to keep telling herself, she'd walked away with nothing before, she could do it again, she could...she...

"I, I need to get out" she whispered, finally breaking the silence as she tried to organise the thoughts racing through her head. "I can't, I can't stay here anymore, I need, I need to move, I can't, I won't settle knowing he's been here." She'd started imagining her house as their home, it was bigger than Iain's so it made sense they'd move in here. She'd imagined what it would be like to come home after a long shift to know Iain was waiting for her, to be able to see him whenever she wanted without having to call him and wait for him to drive over. She'd even, once or twice, imagined what it would be like to hear the sound of little feet running down the stairs to greet her when she came home from work and now, now Mark had ruined that, her beautiful house couldn't be her home any more.

"It's okay" Iain told her as he pushed her things into bin bags, desperately trying not to show how angry or upset he was by what had happened. He took a deep breath to compose himself as he found a picture of them, it had been torn in half, separating the two of them but then Rita's picture had been torn in half again, "you can move in with me if you want. I mean I know it's not as nice as this place but we can redecorate or we can find somewhere else, together I mean, if that's what you want?"

He carried on clearing up as he waited for her response, picking up the teddy he'd won for Rita when they'd visited a local fair, sighing as he threw it into the rubbish bag, it's head no longer attached to its body. He cursed himself for moving too fast, before turning to face Rita, assuming her lack of reply meant that it was too soon for

them to be moving in together.

He never expected to see her curled against the wall, her breath coming in short, sharp gasps as she rocked, frantically trying to fill her lungs with air. He dropped the bag in his hands and raced over to her, falling to his knees in front of her, "take a deep breath Rita."

"I, I can't, I, I'mâ€¦" she was desperate, she felt like the room was closing in on her, like she was slowly being suffocated.

"You can" Iain said calmly as he slowed his own breaths down, "sit back against the wall Love, try not to curl up, that's it" he smiled softly as she did as he asked, "now in and out" he said slowly, "in and out, that's it." She reached out, desperately trying to grab at him, needing the reassurance, the comfort she could only get from him, "I'm here" he said softly as he held Rita's hands in his, "I'm not going anywhere, come on, you can do this, nice steady breaths." He smiled as he heard Rita take a shaky breath, "that's it Reet, you're doing brilliantly, you just keep concentrating on your breathing I'm not going anywhere."

It took almost 20 minutes for Rita's breathing to return to normal but it felt like a lifetime for them both, Rita convinced she was going to die and Iain hating that he could do nothing but hold her hand and remind her that he loved her, because he did, and he'd do anything to keep her safe.

#### 4. Chapter 4

For the record, I think Rita (and some of you) may disagree with my idea of good...

\* \* \*

><p>Rita and Iain returned to work the next morning, and, after arriving early to speak to both Connie and Charlie, it was agreed that Rita would work in resus for a while, that way she'd be less likely to be on her own. They also agreed, with Rita's consent, to inform the rest of the staff so they could all keep their eyes open, not only in case Mark made an appearance, but to be sure Rita was okay.<p>

"Rita" Connie summoned the nurse into her office less than an hour after she'd started her shift, "a word please." Rita nodded and silently followed Connie into her office, sitting in the chair offered to her, "I've spoken to security, the police have already made them aware of the situation."

"Thank you."

Conne took a moment to look at the nurse, she couldn't believe the change in her over the past few days, "is there anything else we can do to help? If you'd like me to refer you to counselling orâ€¦"

"No, no thank you" Rita said softly, "I erm, I appreciate the offer but I, I just want to try and forget about it."

"Okay" Connie nodded, "if you change your mind I'm sure you're aware

of the self referral process or you can come and ask me and I canâ€¦"

"Thank you" Rita nodded, "can I get back to work now?"

"Of course" Connie said, watching Rita leave the office, her shoulders slumped and her head bowed, nothing at all like the strong, feisty woman that had left the hospital a few days ago. Connie made a mental note to keep an eye on the nurse and to speak to Zoe, ask her to try and speak to Rita.

It was another half an hour before Rita saw Iain again after he brought in a patient with Jez. Zoe saw the concerned looks Iain kept throwing in Rita's direction and gently nudged the nurse before nodding towards Iain, "go and speak to him" she said softly.

Rita nodded and made her way out of Resus with Iain, "you alright?" He asked her softly as he held his arms out, Jez taking the trolley back out to the ambulance to give them a minute.

"Yeah" she whispered as she stepped closer to him, allowing him to wrap his arms around her, "just tired andâ€¦" she shrugged, "I can't stop thinking about him."

Iain sighed and kissed Rita's head, "I wish there was something I could do."

"It's not your fault" she whispered.

"It's not yours either" Iain replied quickly.

"I should get back toâ€¦"

"Rita" Iain gently held onto her wrist to stop her walking away, "It's not your fault." She nodded slightly and he kissed her again, "I love you."

"I love you too" she told him before walking back into resus.

"Everything okay?" Zoe asked as she watched Rita pull on some gloves before walking over.

"Yeah" she nodded, "do you want me toâ€¦?" She gestured to a cut on the patient's head and Zoe nodded.

"Please, it just needs cleaning and stitching, I can't see any glass or anything in it."

Rita nodded, "okay" she said quietly as she went to get the equipment she needed.

Zoe frowned slightly as she watched Rita clean and stitch the man's wound, whilst there was no doubting that she was a good nurse, Zoe couldn't help but notice how Rita's hand shook slightly as she wiped the blood from the man's forehead, and the usual casual chat she used to put the patient at ease was absent.

Rita looked up at Zoe once she'd finished, "thanks" Zoe smiled before holding out a small scrap of paper, "could you get Noel or Jack to

ring Mr Hanson's daughter please, her name's Kate."

Rita nodded and forced a smile, "yeah" she said softly as she took the paper from Zoe, "I'll go ask them now."

"Thanks" Zoe said, watching Rita walk out of the room before turning her attention back to the patient.

"Rita" Noel smiled up as he saw her walk behind the desk, "what can we do for you?"

"Mr Hanson in Resus, he was in an RTC, can you ring his daughter please?" She held out the paper with her number on.

"Of course" Noel took the paper from Rita, "how is he if she asks?"

"He's fine, he's got a head injury and he was unconscious for a while so we're waiting to send him up to CT but he's not showing any worrying symptoms so we're not expecting it to show anything major."

"Okay" Noel picked up the phone, "I'll give her a ring now."

"Thanks Noel."

Jacob called Rita over after she'd finished talking to Noel, and, after speaking to him for a moment, she turned to head back to resus. She didn't make it though, she'd just passed the reception desk when she felt someone grab her wrist, "'ere, where's me brother?" Rita froze and the man's grip only got tighter, "you listenin'? Where's me brother?"

"I, I don'tâ€¦"

The man shoved Rita against the wall before stepping closer to her, close enough that she could smell the alcohol on his breath as he leaned in, "look, either you tell me where me brother is or I'llâ€¦"

"You'll do absolutely nothing" Jacob said as he grabbed the man and pulled him away from Rita, "nothing except leave this department right now."

"Piss off, I wasn't talking to you."

"Yeah, well now I'm talking to you" Jacob let security take hold of the man, "and I'm telling you you're leaving" he said, letting the security guard lead the man out of the department as he crouched down to Rita who had slid down the wall and was curled in a ball on the floor, "you alright?" He asked but he got no response, "Rita?" He gently put his hand on her arm and that was enough to startle her back to reality. A rush of adrenaline raced through her system when she felt Jacob's hand on her arm, her heart began to pound against her rib cage, her eyes opened wide in fear, her muscles tensing ready to fight however, when choiced with the options of fight or flight her body chose flight. She sprang from the floor and raced into her office, so fast Jacob barely saw her feet touch the floor.

She only remembered to breathe again once she'd closed, and firmly

locked the door behind herself, choking in air in large gasps as she tried to catch her breath after holding it for so long. She reached out, grabbing at her waste paper bin, pulling it closer as she felt her stomach lurch and she began to heave, not that there was anything in her stomach to bring up, she'd barely eaten since she found out Mark had broken into her house.

"Jacob, have you seen Rita?" Zoe asked as she left resus, her patient on his way for a CT scan, she'd been worried about Rita all day, her concern only growing at the fact Rita hadn't returned after speaking to Noel.

"In her office I think" he said before explaining what had happened, "do you want me to?"

"No, no, I'll go." Zoe said, thanking Jacob as she made her way into cubicles and over to Rita's office. "Rita, Rita it's me, are you in there?" There was no answer, so she tried the door, sighing as she found it locked "Rita, it's just me, let me in please."

"Is everything alright Zoe?" Charlie asked as he saw her stood outside the office he shared with Rita.

"No, it's Rita" she gestured to the combination lock, "can you let me in, I?" she struggled to remember the code for her own office when she was clinical lead, she had no chance with other people's, she could barely remember her own phone number.

"Of course" Charlie quickly punched in the number and pushed open the door, "I'll give you some time, you know where I am if you need anything."

"Thanks Charlie." Zoe stepped into the office and sighed when she saw Rita sat on the floor, her body shaking as she sobbed, "Rita" she said softly, kneeling down beside the nurse, "come here" she wrapped her arms around Rita, holding her tightly until she finally calmed down, "Jacob told me what happened in reception."

"I'm sorry."

"Hey, no, it's not your fault, look, I know what you're probably going to say but have you thought about seeing someone, Ben, he's really?"

"No, no, I, I don't?" Rita took a moment to compose herself, "talking about it, reliving it again and again isn't going to change what happened, it's not going to make things any different."

"Therapy, counselling, it's not about changing what's happened, it's about finding ways to help you cope with what's happened, to help you move forwards."

Rita shook her head, "I don't, I just want to try and forget about it."

"Okay" Zoe didn't want to push Rita, "Do you want to go home?"

Rita shook her head, "No, Iain's working, I don't..."

Zoe nodded, understanding that Rita didn't want to be at home on her own, "Okay, well, take your time, stay in here for a bit if you need to, if we need you I'll come and get you."

"Okay" Rita wiped at her eyes, "I erm, I might try and get some paperwork done."

"That's fine" Zoe smiled, "like I said, if we need you I'll come and let you know."

"I, I'm probably going to lock the door."

"I'll let Charlie know you're in here, anyone who might need to come in knows the code so it's no problem." Zoe stood to her feet and held out her hand for Rita, "let me know if you need anything yeah?"

Rita nodded, "yeah, thanks"

Zoe smiled at Rita as she left the office, hearing the lock click shut almost as soon as the door had closed, she told Charlie that Rita was locked in the office doing paperwork before making her way to Connie's office and knocking firmly on the door, the clinical lead too confined to her office to wade through an endless pile of paperwork.

"Come in."

"Can we talk?" Zoe asked as she walked through the door, "about Rita."

"Is she okay?"

"Do you really think she's fit to be working? I've just found her crying on the floor in her office."

Connie frowned, "Jacob told me what happened, she was assaulted by a patient's relative, after everything that's happened I don't think it's surprising that she's feeling a bit shaken up. I spoke to her this morning and she said she'd like to try and forget what happened and move on, I think the only thing we can do is respect that and give her whatever help and support we can."

"I thinkâ€¦"

"If you notice that her personal life starts to have an effect on her work, or if you think her being here puts patients in danger then let me know and I'll speak to her again, but, after everything, I'm not prepared to insist she takes leave when having the normality and routine of work is probably going to be a help to her." Connie looked up at Zoe, "I'll keep an eye on her" she promised, "and I'm sure everyone else will too, Rita is a much loved member of the team, everyone's looking out for her, she's not on her own."

Rita managed almost three solid hours in her office before Charlie unlocked the door and poked his head inside, "We've got another RTA coming in, ETA 7 minutes, Zoe says can you give us a hand in resus?"

"Sure" Rita nodded, closing the file she'd been writing on, "I'm on my way now."



The stream of patients into resus seemed never ending, and, if she was honest, Rita was glad of that, the busier she was, the more patients she had to focus on, the less her mind wandered to the things she didn't want to think about.

It was several hours later when the last patient was finally transferred up to a ward and Rita was able to return to her office, intending to do more of the paperwork she usually tried to avoid. She frowned as she saw a sheet of paper balanced on top of the files she'd been working on, it certainly hadn't been there when she'd left her office earlier. Her heart stopped as she took a closer look at the note and realised the handwriting was an exact match to that on the note found in her kitchen, '\_Lover Boy's right, of course you'll be safe... as long as you remember that this all needs to stay our little secret. Do as I ask, remember your place and don't try anything stupid like running back to the police and no one's going to get hurt so just remember that. If anyone gets hurt it will be all your fault\_.'

## 5. Chapter 5

Rita felt like the floor had fallen from beneath her feet, her knees buckled and she had to grab at her desk to stop herself falling to the floor. She felt sick, she couldn't breathe, Mark had been in the hospital, in her office and no one had noticed him, no one had stopped him.

She collapsed into her chair, her legs no longer able to support her body, she couldn't do this, she couldn't cope, he'd won, he'd won already, she couldn't do this, she couldn't live with the constant fear, the not knowing when he was next going to turn up, what he was next going to do.

Her hands shook as she read the letter again, he knew, he knew she'd been to the police, he'd been watching her. She also knew that Mark meant what he said, that someone would get hurt if she said anything. Her racing heart skipped a beat as she thought about Iain. Maybe she should leave him, he loved her, she loved him but it wasn't fair. She could leave, let Mark do whatever he wanted without dragging Iain down with her, she could walk away and let him find someone else, someone who he could be happy with, someone he wouldn't have to pretend to care about.

She didn't know how she was going to hide this from him. She was going to have to meet him after her shift and pretend that everything was fine, that she wasn't terrified that her ex-husband was going to suddenly appear, that he wasn't going to put her back in the place she was several years ago.

She didn't realise that she was crying until she saw a teardrop splash onto the paper in her hand and she wiped frantically at her eyes, she had an hour before her shift ended, an hour before she was seeing Iain again. She had an hour to pull herself together and convince herself she was and always would be okay. If she could convince herself she was fine she'd be able to convince Iain too.

The note was hidden at the bottom of a drawer in her desk when Iain

let himself into the office at the end of their shift, she'd given him the code a couple of weeks ago so he could wait for her when she had a few things left to do, "alright?" he asked as he locked the door behind himself, "I heard what happened earlier."

"Yeah, I, I overreacted a bit" she admitted.

"Hey, no" Iain knelt down in front of Rita and took hold of her hands, "you didn't overreact, you've been through a lot over the past few days, you felt threatened, scared and you reacted how a lot of other people would react so don't feel embarrassed or anything like that. Those people out there, Jacob, they're your friends yeah, they're not judging you or laughing at you, they're just worried about you Love."

Rita just nodded simply, "can we go home?"

"Yeah" Iain stood to his feet and held his hands out, "I'll run us a nice bath and then we can order a takeaway yeah? My treat, your choice."

"I'm not hungry."

"I know" Iain said softly, squeezing Rita's hand as they walked together to the staff room so she could change, "but you've barely eaten in days, I'm worried about you" he admitted.

"I'm sorry."

"Don't apologise" Iain pulled her in for a hug once they were in the staffroom and away from prying eyes, "just say you'll have a bath with me tonight and then share a pizza with me in bed while we watch a film."

Rita nodded as Iain kissed her forehead, "I'll try."

"Thank you" he whispered, kissing her again before dropping his arms so she could go and get changed.

Rita curled into Iain's side on the short walk home, she was exhausted, physically and mentally. The note today had just made things even worse, she knew, for Iain's sake she knew she had to try and keep herself together, to somehow pretend that today never happened and that she was fine.

"Pepperoni?" Iain asked as he helped her shrug off her jacket once they were home.

She nodded, "yeah okay."

Iain pecked Rita's lips and rang a local takeaway before going back over to her, "I've asked them to bring it round in about an hour so we can have that bath first" he told her, "do you want to go and set it running and I'll make us a brew?"

"Yeah okay" Rita nodded, "will youâ€¦"

"Yeah" she didn't need to finish, she didn't need to, "I'll set the alarm before I come up, of course I will."

"Thanks" Rita gently kissed Iain's lips before heading up the stairs to start running their bath.

She was already sat amongst the bubbles when Iain arrived in the bathroom after setting the alarm that covered the downstairs of the house and bringing their teas up, "scoot up" he said, waiting for Rita to shuffle forwards before passing her both mugs so he could slip in behind her, allowing her to sit back against his chest.

He smiled as he felt her body melt against him, finally allowing herself to relax now she was safe at home with Iain, "I'm so tired" she mumbled, her eyes closed as she sipped at her tea.

"Well after the pizza how about I give you a back massage and then we have an early night?"

"Yeah" Rita smiled slightly, "I think I'd like that."

They stayed in the bath until the water cooled, Iain getting out first so he could help Rita out. He passed her one of the two towels she'd placed on the radiator before wrapping his own dressing gown around her shoulders, smiling as the thick blue fabric which came to the middle of his calf, almost dragged on the floor as Rita walked through to the bedroom.

Iain pulled on a pair of shorts and a tshirt so he was decent when the food arrived before snuggling into Rita who'd chosen to remain wrapped in his dressing gown, "do you want to watch a film or something?" he asked.

Rita shrugged, "put one on if you want but I doubt I'll be able to concentrate on anything" she whispered, "I'm too tired."

"Okay" Iain reached for the TV remote, and, instead of a film, he flicked to one of the radio channels and turned the volume down low, "you're shaking" he frowned as Rita curled into his side.

"Sorry."

"Don't apologise. Let's see if it gets any better once you've had some pizza, you've barely eaten these past few days, I bet your blood sugar's through the floor."

Almost right on cue the doorbell rang and Iain kissed Rita's forehead before making his way down the stairs to get the food. He carried the pizza upstairs with a large bottle of coke and two glasses, pausing halfway up to set the alarm with the fob on his keyring, "here we go, one large pepperoni pizza and some full fat coke to get your blood sugar up again."

Rita smiled, "are we eating in bed?"

"Yeah" Iain nodded, "you look comfortable so why not."

She nodded, snuggling into his side as he got back into bed, resting the pizza box across their laps as he poured out the coke, "get stuck in then" he smiled softly.

Rita managed just a slice and half of the pizza before the knot in

her stomach stopped her eating any more, "I'm sorry" she whispered, "it was a nice gesture but I, I'm just not hungry."

"It's okay" he kissed her cheek, "you ate something, it's better than nothing, will you try and eat something in the morning? Just some toast or something?"

"Yeah" Rita nodded, "I'll try."

"Thank you."

Iain finished off the pizza before putting the box on the floor, "do you still want a back massage?" he asked once he'd finished.

She nodded, "please, if you don't mind?"

"Of course not" he kissed her softly, "let me wash my hands and get that massage oil, you get comfy, I won't be a minute."

He came back to find Rita laid on her stomach on her side of the bed, the dressing gown folded at the waist so that it was still covering her legs but her back was exposed. Iain knelt on the bed, carefully straddling Rita's thighs as he dropped a line of feather light kisses along Rita's spine before pouring some oil into his hands, rubbing them together to warm it up before beginning to massage her muscles, tight from stress and worry.

Iain's massage relaxed Rita so much that she fell asleep before he'd finished but Iain didn't stop, he worked his way to the base of Rita's spine before pulling his dressing gown back up to cover her back before he pulled the covers over her. He got back into bed and laid on his side, watching her sleep. She looked so peaceful, like the past few days hadn't happened, like she wasn't almost completely broken. He hated Mark for what he'd done and he hated himself for not keeping Rita safe, for not being able to do anything to make her feel better.

He gently kissed her forehead, being careful not to disturb her, he knew she hadn't been sleeping well so he wanted her to get as much rest as she could before another nightmare woke her. She hadn't mentioned much about her marriage to Mark but from what she had told him he knew it hadn't been good, that Mark coming back had only brought back bad memories for her. He only wished he could keep her safe in his arms for the rest of her life.

Iain too finally fell into a restless slumber, he felt like he could no longer fall as deeply to sleep as he did before all this happened, it was as if he was constantly on edge, unable to completely fall asleep in case Rita needed him.

He yawned a while later as he woke, reaching out for his phone to check the time, 3.27am. He rolled over and reached out an arm only to be met with cold bedsheets instead of Rita's warm body like he'd been expecting. It took him a second before he realised the curtains he definitely remembered closing were open and, once his eyes became accustomed to the semi darkness he realised Rita was sat on the windowsill, her head against the cool glass, watching the raindrops that ran down the window pane in time with the tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Reet" he whispered softly, her head snapping almost violently towards him, "sorry, I didn't mean to scare you."

"It's fine" she wiped her eyes with the sleeve of Iain's dressing gown, "I didn't want to wake you either but I knew you'd worry if you woke up and I wasn't here."

Iain nodded, "can I join you?" he asked softly.

"Yeah" Rita whispered, "if you want."

Iain stood from the bed, pulling the duvet with him, "shuffle forwards" he said softly, waiting for Rita to do so before he sat behind her, wrapping the duvet around them both as Rita leant back against his chest, "want to talk about it?" he asked softly.

"I'm never going to get away from him" Rita whispered, "no matter how much time passes, how far I move away, he's always going to be in my head Iain, he's always going to win."

"He's not Rita, we won't let him okay? I know right now that it might feel like this is never going to end but it will Darling, it might take weeks, months, it might even take years but it doesn't matter, we'll get through this, we'll move on from what's happened and we'll do it together. You don't have to fight him on your own any more."

"I love you" Rita whispered as fresh tears rolled down her cheeks. She wished she could tell Iain about the note, she wanted so much to tell him just how terrified she was of the man she used to be married to but she couldn't. She knew Mark, she knew that he meant what he said, he already knew she'd been to the police and even if he was kidding, even if Mark was lying about someone getting hurt if she told anyone, Rita simply couldn't take that chance, she'd keep it to herself even if it killed her. At least if she was dead she wouldn't have to deal with this any more.

## 6. Chapter 6

I only realised once I'd finished writing that there's no Iain in this chapter, there's some Freechamp though if that makes up for the lack of Iain?

\* \* \*

><p>Over a week passed where Rita didn't hear from Mark, it wasn't enough to convince her that he was gone for good though, she knew him, she knew he'd be waiting, he'd be planning something. She knew he wouldn't leave her alone that easily.<p>

She was somehow managing to convince Iain that she was 'okay' that she was moving on and slowly putting what Mark had done behind her. Rita had no idea how she was managing to hide her true feelings from Iain, the panic attacks, the tears, the fear that felt like it was constantly eating away at her, he had no idea. He knew that she still had 'moments' when they were alone together where she broke down in his arms and he knew her sleep was still frequently disturbed by nightmares but he had no idea how vivid, how violent her dreams were.

Rita felt so guilty, she hated that she was hiding things from Iain, she wanted so much to tell him about the note Mark had left in her office but she couldn't risk it, she couldn't risk anything happening to anyone else just because she couldn't keep her mouth shut.

The security Iain had installed made her feel safe at home, but at work, the fact Mark had been in her office had her constantly on edge. All her colleagues were worried about her, she'd never spent more than 20 minutes alone in her office without someone finding an excuse to come and check she was okay, even down to Dylan once knocking on her door, "I hadn't seen you in a while" he said when he found her doing paperwork, "I feel better now I've checked you're okay" he'd told her, closing the door and walking off before Rita had had chance to reply.

She still enjoyed her job though, the routine helped and sometimes they were so busy that she didn't get time for a break, she didn't get to sit down and listen to all the voices in her head, she didn't have time to stop and think about anything other than her job and her patients. Those were the days she liked the best.

Rita walked into her office half an hour after her shift started one morning, a huge smile forming on her face as she saw a large bunch of flowers stood on her desk, he'd fiercely deny it but Iain could be such a romantic at times. She ran her finger gently over the petal of a soft pink lily before reaching for the card, slipping it from the small envelope, her breath catching in her throat as she realised the flowers weren't from Iain. She stood frozen to the spot, unable to look away from the card in her hand as she read the words again and again, the paper only slipping from her fingers, floating under her desk as she turned to vomit into her bin.

\_'See how pleasant it is for everyone concerned when you keep your pretty little mouth shut. You do as you're told like a good little girl and no one gets hurt, just remember that. I think I'd probably go for that doctor you're so friendly with first, that one would be easy, imagine it, she goes out for a cigarette and she's never seen again. You know what to do if you don't want it to happen.'\_

She felt her chest tighten, she knew she'd never be able to tell Iain that her panic attacks were becoming more frequent, more severe. He'd ask her why and she could never tell him that, if she told him she didn't know why he'd want to get help and she couldn't, this was her problem, she had to deal with it on her own.

She closed her eyes, trying to ignore the thoughts racing in her mind, trying to focus on her breathing. She tried to imagine Iain was there, holding her hand telling her he loved her, telling her to take some deep breaths. It didn't work, she felt like her head was underwater, she couldn't breathe, she was suffocating, and, when black spots started dancing in front of her eyes she knew this was it, she was going to die here and there was a little part of her that was relieved.

She hadn't heard the knock on the door, she hadn't seen Connie step into the office, hadn't heard her begin to ask for some paperwork, she hadn't heard the gasp as the Clinical Lead saw her so obviously struggling to breathe. She was only aware that she wasn't alone when Connie gently turned her chair away from her desk, crouched down in

front of her and took hold of her shaking hands. "Rita" Connie said softly but firmly, "Rita, can you look at me?"

Rita slowly lifted her head, briefly noticing the concern on Connie's face. "That's it" Connie said softly, rubbing her thumbs over the back of Rita's hands, Connie had never seen anyone look so terrified, "you're okay, you're having a panic attack but you're okay, you need to try and slow your breathing down okay, in...and out" Rita tried to do as Connie asked, she tried to breathe when she was told, "that's it, you're doing really well Rita, you're going to be okay, just keep your breathing nice and steady, you're okay."

Connie kept talking softly to Rita, running her thumbs over the back of the nurse's hands, and reassuring her that she was okay. It was only once Rita's breathing had returned to a rate Connie was happy with that the clinical lead let go of her hands, standing up to retrieve a box of tissues from Rita's desk and offering them to her. Rita reached out with shaking hands, she hadn't even realised she'd been crying until Connie held out the tissues. Connie waited for Rita to wipe at her cheeks before asking, "do you want me to get Iain?"

Connie saw the fear flood over Rita's face, "no, please, no, he doesn'tâ€¦" Rita began to get worked up and Connie knew she had to calm her down again before she had another panic attack.

"If you don't want me to tell him then I won't say a word" Connie said before asking, "are you okay to walk to my office?"

Rita nodded, "I think so."

"Okay, come on" Connie thought that getting Rita out of the place where she'd had the panic attack might help, her breaths were still coming faster than usual and Connie would be lying if she said she wasn't worried about Rita. "Steady" she reached out to grab Rita as she stumbled forward, her legs feeling like jelly.

"I'm sorry" Rita whispered before beginning to sob, "I'm sorry."

Even Connie was surprised when she pulled Rita into a hug, rubbing circles on her back to try and comfort her, "you're okay, you don't need to apologise."

It was almost an hour after Connie had walked into Rita's office when she finally returned back to her own office, "sit down" she said to Rita, "I'll make you a cup of tea." Rita nodded, moving to sit on the sofa without another word, "do you want to go home?" she asked as she sat beside her a few minutes later, two mugs in her hand.

"I...no" Rita said quietly, "I don't like being there on my own."

"Because of Mark?"

"Yeah."

"Do you think he's the reason you had a panic attack or is there something else?"

"I, I've had a few since he broke into my house" Rita admitted, "none as bad as that one though."

"Does Iain know?"

Rita nodded, "he was there the first couple of times but now, Iâ€|" she shrugged, "he thinks I'm getting over it, I don't want to worry him."

"Have you thought about seeing someone, a therapist I mean? Or at least speaking to your GP?"

Rita shook her head, "I, I just want to forget about it."

"I know you do but if you're having panic attacks that severe Rita then, my professional opinion, would be that you would be wise to speak to someone and get some help, but I'm sure you know that so whilst I will tell you that is what I would recommend as a doctor, I'm not going to force you if it's not what you want to do."

"Thank you."

Connie sat with Rita until she finished her own tea, "I'm going to check on my patient in Resus, I don't want you working just yet, take some time to get yourself together first, take as long as you need, you can stay in here for as long as you need to."

"Thank you." Rita whispered, "for everything."

When Connie returned to her office a while later she found Rita had fallen asleep on her sofa, she couldn't blame her, Connie knew from experience exactly how exhausting a panic attack could be so she simply made her way over to her desk to get on with her paperwork, leaving Rita to sleep.

Rita woke a while later, Connie had been called to assist in resus so Rita was on her own. She frowned slightly as she sat up, she couldn't believe she'd fallen asleep in Connie's office. She took a minute to get herself together, still feeling slightly groggy, a feeling she was getting used to after the panic attacks that only seemed to be getting more frequent.

She slowly made her way to her office, she picked up the card from the floor by her desk and placed it in her desk drawer with the note she'd received before picking up the flowers, she knew people would ask questions if she simply threw them in the bin so she carried them through to the staff room, placing them on the counter before quickly retreating back to her office.

She sat at her desk, her head in her hands as tears began to roll down her cheeks, something else that was becoming a regular occurrence. She couldn't do this, she couldn't take any more, she needed Mark to either leave her alone or to get on with whatever it was that he was going to do. She knew he wouldn't. She knew he'd be enjoying dragging it out, it was obvious he was watching her and she knew he'd be enjoying watching her suffer, he'd break her down piece by piece just like he had in the past. She knew if she wanted this hell to end then she'd have to do something to end it.

"You okay?" Charlie asked when he found Rita, staring blankly into



the drugs cabinet.

Rita jumped slightly, she hadn't heard him come in, "yeah" she lied, "yeah."

"Are you looking for something?" he asked, knowing how hard it was to sometimes spot what you needed, at the end of a long shift all the boxes seemed to look identical.

"No, yeah, I mean I know it's not really allowed" Rita quickly thought of an excuse, "but I've got a banging headache, I was going to self prescribe a couple of paracetamol."

Charlie laughed, quickly finding the open box, "here" he pulled out a strip of the tablets, "just this once, I won't tell if you won't."

Rita forced a smile, "thanks Charlie."

"It's alright, try and drink plenty of water too, if you're dehydrated that'll only make the headache worse but then you probably know that already don't you?"

Rita nodded, slipping the pills into the pocket on her uniform, "thanks."

She collapsed into her chair once she was back in her office, she wasn't sure if she was relieved or disappointed that Charlie had come in before she'd had chance to take anything and that terrified her. There was a chance, even if right now it seemed miniscule, there was still a chance, that one day she'd be free from Mark and the fear he imposed upon her but she knew, no matter how hard she tried, she'd never be able to run from the demons in her own head.

## 7. Chapter 7

This is going somewhere eventually, I promise!

\* \* \*

><p>It had been a month since Mark had broken into Rita's house and everyone was worried about her, she'd withdrawn completely, she hardly ate, she barely slept due to the nightmares and panic attacks that disturbed her every single night. She was running herself into the ground and everyone felt powerless to stop her. Mark had won, both Rita and Iain knew that, he might not physically be controlling her, but her mind, her mind was his, a constant stream of 'what ifs' echoing in her head. She was still getting the notes from Mark, the last one reminding her that he wasn't planning on leaving her alone any time soon.<p>

\_ 'I haven't forgotten about you, I'll be in touch soon to tell you what you need to do, and you'd better do it or we might have to find out if LoverBoy will still want you when your pretty little face isn't so pretty and we wouldn't want that now would we Darling, I'd hate that just as much as you.' \_

She'd somehow managed to avoid Iain finding out about them, the notes all hidden in the bottom drawer of her desk, she couldn't tell

anyone, she knew Mark meant what he said, him hurting her she could deal with but the fact he'd already threatened to hurt Zoe turned her stomach, she couldn't let anyone else get hurt because of her own stupidity.

The only place Rita ever felt truly safe was in Iain's arms, they'd been lucky that they'd managed to work similar shift patterns for so long, the slight variations meaning they'd go in and leave work together, one of them usually waiting in the staffroom either for the start of their shift or for the other to finish, Iain knew Rita didn't want to be in the house on her own, that she didn't want to be too far from him and he did everything he could to avoid that happening.

"Rita" Iain said softly, "I erm, I've got to do some night shifts next week" he told her calmly one evening, "I've tried to swap but we're really short staffed andâ€¦" he'd hoped that the first time they'd been on opposite shifts would have seen him on days and Rita on nights so she could at least get used to being on her own in the daytime, if he was honest he didn't know how she'd cope spending the night alone.

"Oh right" she'd said, panic already beginning to set in, 'what if Mark was watching the house?' 'What if he knew she was home on her own?' 'What if he broke in again?' She had to force herself to keep breathing, she couldn't let Iain know how scared she was, she couldn't make him think he couldn't leave her on her own. She was a grown adult, it wasn't fair that Iain felt like he needed to constantly be looking out for her, he should be free to do whatever he wanted without her holding him back.

"Are you sure you'll be okay?" Iain asked, "I erm, I could ask Zoe if she'd come round orâ€¦"

"No, no I'll be fine" Rita tried to convince both herself and Iain, "I'll set the alarm and stay upstairs" she told him, "I'll be fine."

"Okay Love, but if you change your mind I'm sure someone wouldâ€¦"

Rita shook her head, "I'll be fine Iain, don't worry about me."

"I can't help it" Iain said softly, "I love you Reet, I'll always worry you."

The day of Iain's first night shift arrived quickly, and Rita was already upstairs, curled up on the bed when he left. He kissed her, reminded her he loved her and told her to call him if she needed anything before he left, making sure to set the alarm for the downstairs of the house on his way out.

"Are you going home?" Iain asked, walking into the department just as Ethan and Cal were walking out.

"Yeah, we've bought a sega megadrive" Cal told him, "we're going to relive our childhood as I beat Ethan at every single game we've got."

"Will you do us a favour? I'll make it worth your while the next time

we're in the pub."

"What is it?" Cal asked

"Will you stop off at mine and check on Rita? It's the first time I've worked a nightshift and she's been at home on her own since Mark came back."

Ethan nodded, "of course, we'll let you know how she is."

"Thanks, she erm, just between us, she's had a couple of panic attacks since everything happened soâ€¦"

"Nah, don't worry about it mate, we'll go and see she's okay" Cal said, patting Iain on the back before leaving the department with Ethan.

Cal knocked on Iain's door after a short drive from the hospital, "she's not answering" he called back down to Ethan who was waiting in the car, "do you think she's gone out?"

Ethan got out of the car, dialling Rita's number as he walked up to his brother, "she's not answering either."

"Ring her again" Cal frowned, waiting for Ethan to do so and pressing his ear to the wood, "I can hear her phone ringing inside."

"Rita" Ethan called as he knocked on the door, "it's Ethan, it's just me and Cal, can you let us in? It's just us, there's no one else here." They heard the scrape of the locks turning before the door opened just a crack, "it's just me and Cal" Ethan said softly, "we just came to see how you were."

Rita closed the door once she saw it was just Cal and Ethan, slipping of the chains so she could open the door properly, "Iain's at work" she said quietly, her red eyes giving away the fact she'd been crying.

"I know" Rita seemed to be responding to Ethan so Cal hovered by the door, letting Ethan do the talking, "are you okay?" he asked.

"Iâ€¦" she shrugged, "I don't know."

Ethan held his arms out and Rita gratefully accepted the hug, more tears beginning to fall. "Why don't we pack you a bag?" Cal suggested, "you can come and stay with us til Iain's home so you're not on your own."

Ethan nodded, "shall we do that? Cal's bought a retro games console, he think's he's going to, and I quote, 'completely thrash' me on all the games he's got. You can help me beat him."

"Thank you" Rita whispered, "Iâ€¦"

Ethan smiled softly, "let's get you some things together yeah?"

"I'll let Iain know" Cal told them both, "so he doesn't worry when he gets home."

"Thank you" Rita whispered.

Ethan went upstairs with Rita to pack a bag as Cal rang Iain, "Cal mate" he answered quickly, "is Rita alright?"

"She's a bit upset" Cal told him, "I think she's scared about being her on her own, she's upstairs with Ethan, packing a bag, she's going to come and stay with us tonight, I just didn't want you to worry if you came home and she wasn't here."

"Cheers Mate, look after her won't you."

"Yeah, course we will, you know we will."

"Will you, will you tell her I love her?" Iain asked quietly.

"Yeah" Cal smiled, knowing it wasn't the right time to tease his friend, "of course I will."

"Thanks, and tell her I'll give her a ring later when I'm on my break."

"Alright. Don't worry about Rita, she'll be alright."

"I know mate, thanks."

Ethan came back down stairs a while later with Rita, a black holdall on his shoulder, "right, I think we should go to the supermarket on the way home, get some snacks and things for our slumber party."

"Slumber party?" Iain teased, "what are you, a 14 year old girl?"

"No Iâm!"

"Chill Nibbles, you know I'll never say no to, well, nibbles" he laughed at his own joke before looking at Rita, "I called Iain so he didn't worry about you, he asked me to tell you that he loves you and that he'll call you later when he gets a break."

Rita spent the evening sat on the sofa between Cal and Ethan, she'd turned down actually playing the games but occasionally pointed out something to help Ethan as he was trailing considerably behind his brother. She had to admit, she certainly felt less stressed, less worried now she wasn't at home on her own. She wasn't sure if Ethan would be much use if anything happened but he seemed good at keeping her calm, making her relax slightly and she knew Cal was like Iain, that he'd try and protect her as well as he could.

"You okay?" Cal asked, grabbing a handful of popcorn whilst Ethan went to make another cup of tea for himself and Rita, Cal sticking to the beers he'd bought from the shop.

"Yeah" Rita said quietly, "thanks for letting me stay."

"It's alright, are you sure you don't want anything to eat?"

Rita shook her head, "I'm okay thank you."

"Everyone's worried about you Rita, weâ€|" Cal sighed softly, he'd never been great at expressing his feelings "we, we just want you to be okay."

"I'm sorry" Rita dropped her gaze to the floor.

"Hey, no, don't apologise, just, just let us know if there's anything you can do for us yeah?"

Rita sat in silence for the rest of the night, only speaking when Iain rang her like he promised he would. She spoke briefly to him in the privacy of Ethan's bedroom, reassuring him that she was okay, that Cal and Ethan were looking after her and telling him that she loved him.

Cal offered to sleep on the sofa that night, letting Rita sleep in his bed. She couldn't settle though, every time she closed her eyes Mark was there, leering at her, grabbing at her, his hands all over her body. She wanted Iain, she needed Iain to hold her closely, she needed Iain to tell her everything was going to be okay.

It was a little after 2 when she pulled herself out of bed, gently padding through to the kitchen to get herself a glass of water, she'd given up attempting to sleep, she felt guilty that Cal had given up his bed but she couldn't sleep, she just wanted to be at home with Iain.

"Hey" Cal said softly as he stood in the kitchen doorway, "are you alright."

"I erm, I was just getting some water, is that okay? I didn't mean to wake you."

"You didn't" Cal said, walking into the kitchen and getting himself some water, "and of course, it's fine, help yourself to whatever. I think Ethan's got some horlicks or something somewhere if you fancy it, to help you sleep?"

Rita shook her head, "I erm, you can have your bed back, I don't think I'll sleep, not without Iain."

"Would it help if I came in with you? I mean to sleep on the floor or something?" Rita shrugged, "why don't we try it?" Cal suggested, "only if you're comfortable with be being in there with you?"

Rita nodded, "you erm, you can share the bed if you like, I mean we're both adults."

"Okay" Cal smiled, "if you're sure you can resist me" he winked cheekily, "I'll just grab my pillows and then I'll be in."

"Cal" Ethan mumbled sleepily, walking out of his own room, just in time to see Cal following Rita into his own, "what are you doing, I thought Rita was staying in there?"

"She said she can't sleep without Iain, I asked if she thought sharing would help, why don't you come too, make it a real slumber party? And at least if this ever gets out you can back me up and say I didn't try anything."

Ethan nodded and followed Cal into the room, "Cal, I can't believe you didn't tidy up, Rita, if I'd have known I'd have let you have my room, I'm so so sorry" he said as he took in the state of his brother's room.

Rita shrugged from where she sat in the middle of the bed, the duvet pulled up to her chin, "I don't mind."

"Well" Cal flopped onto the bed, "I don't know about you two but I'm suddenly wide awake, how about a film?"

Ethan nodded, "sounds like a good idea to me, shall I get the popcorn?"

Cal rolled his eyes, "you'll be asking me to paint your nails next, any preference?"

"Anything but a horror film."

"Rita?" Cal asked, anything you'd like to watch?

Rita shook her head, "I don't mind."

"Okay" Cal stuck a DVD in the player and grabbed the remote, "don't complain if you two don't like it then" he said as he got into bed.

It didn't take long, Rita didn't know if it was the fact that a small light had been left on, the soft noise of the TV or the fact she felt safe sat in between Cal and Ethan but it didn't take long, less than half an hour into the film her body gave in and her eyes fluttered closed, her body slumping into Ethan's as she finally fell asleep.

End  
file.